

Ashington Town Council

Draft Minutes of the Climate Change & Environment Committee Meeting held at 5:30pm on Tuesday 30th April 2024, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX.

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Cllr Sophie Robinson (Chair), Cllr Lynne Grimshaw, Cllr Caroline Ball, Cllr Marjorie Chambers, Cllr Louis Brown, Cllr Jim Lang, Cllr Glyn Davis, Cllr Graeme Wright, Cllr Matthew Cuthbert, Cllr John Tully, and Cllr Pauline Thompson.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE:

Sarah Eden – Executive Officer/RFO, Stephen Humphrey – Assets & Development Manager, Alan Bunker – Allotments Officer, Ryan Appleby – Neighbourhood Services Officer, Mark Air – Neighbourhood Services Officer and Gary Holmes – Administration Assistant.

CCE24/039 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Cllr Sophie Robinson welcomed everyone to the meeting.

CCE24/040 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Paul Wright and Cllr Victor Bridges.

CCE24/041 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interests from Councillors.

CCE24/042 DISPENSATIONS

There were no requests for dispensations from Councillors.

CCE24/043 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were three members of the public present, but no items brought forward for question.

CCE24/044 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** and sign as a true record, the minutes of the meeting held on 27th February 2024, with an edit to the apologies for absence to include Cllr Pauline Thompson.

CCE24/045 CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATES

It was **AGREED** to receive the following update, sent out with the agenda.

Please see all updates from officers on CCE decisions with links to website where PR has been shared.

Action for Insects

Since the last meeting, a series of engagement across website and Facebook has been shared.
<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2024-03-13-ashington-gets-buzzing-for-insects>
<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2024-03-18-action-for-insects-how-to-build-a-hedgehog-home>
<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2024-03-15--build-a-bat-box-for-action-for-insects>

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River Wansbeck Estuary & Barrage Project

A meeting of the Wansbeck Riverside Park Water Environment Management Group took place in March. The Wansbeck Barrage celebrates its 50th anniversary this year and attendees expressed an interest in marking the occasion.

Groundwork is continuing to work with Northumberland County Council to find a way to still allow for river use alongside a more natural tidal regime. The next steps are to find the preferred option and how to fund it.

Work continues the plans to install a pontoon at Cambois Rowing Club that will benefit a mix of users of the River Wansbeck.

Cllr John Tully took the opportunity to highlight the importance of the barrage to the town, Riverside Park, and surrounding areas. There was a discussion about the Council's limited powers in this regard but an acknowledgement of the importance of lobbying for investment in repairs and maintenance.

Concerns were raised regarding the responsibility for the repair and maintenance of the barrage, with suggestions that the Environmental Agency should be the primary authority responsible for undertaking these tasks.

It was discussed that whilst the Town Council may feel it appropriate to write to the Environment Agency, we are part of a group with several partners, and a combined letter from that group could be more appropriate.

Tree Planting Schemes

Two Defra funded tree planting schemes, in the Haydon ward, have taken place during March, at North Seaton Road, adjacent to Green Lane Workshops, and the field adjacent to Greencroft.
<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2024-03-08-tree-planting-scheme-in-north-seaton>

A further scheme was planned for the grassed area on Green Lane, however, permissions from the landowner could not be secured in time for this planting season. It is envisaged this scheme will take place in the autumn.

Additionally, the tree planting scheme in Seaton ward, funded by the Town Council, also took place in March, and saw 8 standard trees planted in the Hillcrest and South Side area, adjacent to the B1334. The work was carried out by the town council's contractor Brambledown Landscape Services.

As agreed at the F&GS Committee on the 14th April, the Town Council will be assisting Ashington Cricket Club in developing a tree planting and enhancement scheme in the Club's grounds in preparation of the marking of the 80th anniversary of the ending of WW2 in 2025. The project will also work with the Royal British Legion and the Reiverdale scout Group.

<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2024-04-24-ashington-honours-world-war-ii-fallen-with-memorial-arboretum>

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Bulb & Wildflower Planting Schemes

Work on the wildflower planting schemes has commenced. Working closely with Northumberland County Council, as landowners, the following sites have been selected for planting:

- People's Park - Around the trees opposite Wansbeck Road
- River Wansbeck - The grassy area between Wansbeck Riverside Park and the bridge
- Paddock Wood - The grassy area between the woodland and field, and the area next to the Community Centre

We are taking a phased approach, starting with these areas to gauge success before potentially expanding wildflower planting efforts. Establishing the spaces takes careful preparation, so seeing how they flourish will inform best practices moving forward. We will also be placing signage in these areas to remind residents and visitors that this work is ongoing. Residents will be encouraged to keep an eye on the wildflower areas. The work is being carried out by our contractor WL Straughan.

The spring bulb planting schemes, at 9 locations around the town, have generally worked well, as agreed at the CC&E committee in September and several positive comments have been received from members of the public and Cllrs. The scheme at Holy Sepulchre Church did not do well, however, we can revisit this scheme in the autumn if the Council wish to develop further works.

<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2024-04-30-town-and-county-councils-partner-to-bring-wildflowers-to-ashington-green-spaces>

It was mentioned how beautiful the entrance to Ashington looks once the planting has been completed, and that it's exciting to see how Ashington will look once the wildflowers have been completed and grown to completion.

The Great British Spring Clean 2024

The Ashington effort for the Great British Spring Clean 2024 took place from the 26th – 30th March with litter picks at the following locations:

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------|
| - Hirst Area | - Peoples Park |
| - Wansbeck Riverside | - Paddock Wood |

Over 100 bags of rubbish were collected as well as various fly tipping by volunteers. In providing this work, the Town Council appreciated the support of NCC staff.

Students from Castle School also did their part, with pupils tidying up the school grounds as part of the campaign. The Town Council provided essential equipment such as litter pickers and bags to support the endeavours.

Additionally, a Brownie Group carried out a litter pick of the area around Hirst Park on the 25th April and we will publicise this work in coming days.

<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2024-04-02-ashington-community-unites-for-successful-great-british-spring-clean>

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Allotment Works

A 'Good Bug Guide' flyer is being created to be displayed on all allotment sites. This is a good source of information that plot holders can utilise, it will include a QR code on flyer for direct link to allotment page on our website which will provide updates, especially useful during allotment action weeks.

Further investigation in relation to pesticides on allotment sites is being conducted. The following areas are being considered for wilding: Hirst East End (area closest to the train track), orchards to be created on the Wansbeck Road site in the autumn, future development on the Seaton Hirst site with longer term plans as plots have been abandoned for a number of years due to drainage issues, and Woodhorn Road site where there are drainage issues.

Climate Change Initiative – School Poster Competition

The Climate Change poster competition has been launched and schools are very enthusiastic, members may have seen that schools have shared this on Facebook. Outside apertures that can be used on litter bins and bus shelters have been priced to display the posters throughout the town. These can also be used to display our events and any other messaging that the Council wishes to get into the public domain.

Tree Planting Feedback

As agreed at the last CC Meeting, we have written out to residents who engaged with our tree planting target to ask how trees are getting along. Gary is currently compiling the feedback to display in an engaging way and encouraging residents to keep in touch.

Fly tipping

Sadly, levels of fly-tipping have increased when comparing the recently ended and previous financial year. As well as the press release, following consultation with Cllrs, we have written to the Cabinet Member for 'Looking after our Communities,' and the Leader of NCC with a view to a more strategic look at the problem, and a way forward (see copy below).

<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2024-04-26-ashington-says-no-to-litter-bugs>

"As the cabinet member responsible for 'looking after our communities,' including issues related to fly-tipping and enforcement, I would like to share our PR that highlights the alarming figures on fly-tipping and litter in our area. Despite the Town Council's significant investment of nearly £250,000 in supporting Local Services and their efforts to tackle this issue, the problem is worsening rather than improving.

<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2024-04-26-ashington-says-no-to-litter-bugs>

We have a great working relationship with the Local Services Team, and the dedicated Rapid Response team we fund. Our Members regularly meet with Team Leaders and Senior Officers as part of the Partnership Board, again working collaboratively, however, we continue to struggle to identify a sustainable solution. Our paid response to illegal fly-tipping appears to be perceived as a service, which could now be encouraging the behaviour – there is nothing practical acting as a deterrent.

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We recognise that behavioural change is the most challenging aspect to address, and education efforts, such as 'Love Your Neighbourhood' and litter picks, have been undertaken. However, we believe that additional measures are needed. We have suggested amnesties and scheduled whole street clear ups, that are scheduled rather than reactive (like those carried out in South Tyneside), but these proposals have not been supported by NCC Environmental Enforcement, we appreciate as they go against the grain. Punitive action against those who are already struggling financially is unlikely to be the answer. We have previously supported the employment of a dedicated Enforcement Officer, but I don't have the figures before to identify any impact.

One contributing factor that has been identified is the frequent turnover of tenants in properties. With this in mind, we are keen to learn more about the Selective Licensing of Landlords scheme in Blyth. One of the stated outcomes of this scheme was 'It will assist in improving the visual aspect of the property and the area by putting greater emphasis on ensuring that properties remain clean, free from rubbish and that waste is dealt with quickly and appropriately.' Is the scheme having an effect?

Members would like to invite you to Ashington to look at this issue and the figures in detail, and to look at how we move forward positively. We already have a collaborative approach with the Local Services team but would welcome your response and any further efforts that could be tried.

Social housing decarbonisation and retrofitting properties

At the previous CCE Meeting it was agreed to write back to Bernicia for updated figures. Bernicia had previously sent detail on the above, but this was not specific to Ashington. We have not received any further update.

"Members of the Climate Change Committee are keen to hear more about the environmental commitment strategy of Bernicia and wondered if there was anyone who could attend a future meeting, once the busy end of year is over.

The committee meet quarterly, future dates as below:

- ❖ Tuesday 30th April 2024, 5:00pm
- ❖ Tuesday 30th July 2024, 5:00pm
- ❖ Tuesday 28th October 2024 5:00pm
- ❖ Tuesday 11th March 2025, 5:00pm

It would be great to have someone along to better understand the SHDF programme and particularly the education that is carried out."

Advance Northumberland did provide ratings although housing is privately rented and not subject to the same targets as social housing. Having read that Ascent Homes (the housebuilding arm of Advance Northumberland), is championing sustainability, and building new homes with energy efficiency at the forefront, we wrote to ask if they would consider attending a future meeting to update on this. We have not received a response to date.

"Members of the Climate Change Committee were pleased to receive information on energy ratings on homes in Ashington and would be open to receiving any further updates in relation to the decarbonisation and retrofitting of Ashington properties in the future.

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I read the article below with interest and wondered if anyone would be willing to attend a future meeting of the Council's Climate Change Committee to talk about these projects and anything coming up specifically in Ashington. We meet quarterly and have scheduled the next meeting dates for Tuesday 30th April 2024, Tuesday 30th July 2024, Tuesday 28th October 2024, Tuesday 11th March 2025, all starting at 5:00pm.

It would be great to have someone along.

[Sustainability – at the heart of Advance Northumberland | Blogs | Insider Media”](#)

CCE24/046 MINER’S MEMORIAL MEADOWS

It was AGREED to RECEIVE a proposal to lead on the restoration of the Miners’ Memorial Meadows in Ashington Community Woods, and to set aside a seed fund of £3,000 from the Climate Change budget.

It was AGREED to form a project steering group with key stakeholders including but not limited to; Groundwork North East, Northumberland County Council (NCC), Friends of Ashington Community Woods, Ashington Parkrun, and Ashington Hirst Running Club to guide the revitalisation efforts.

It was AGREED to initiate a site assessment with Groundwork North East and NCC to evaluate the current condition of the meadows and determine the specific improvements and maintenance required to restore them to a fitting memorial state.

CCE24/047 ASHINGTON COMMUNITY BIRD BOX INITIATIVE

It was AGREED to RECEIVE a proposal to construct and install bird boxes throughout the town in trees and green spaces in Ashington, as well as supplying bird box kits to engage schools and community groups, and to set aside money from the Climate Change budget to fund the project.

It was noted that the excitement for such a venture is high within the Council and that the project is a welcome one alongside the future wildflower planting scheme to encourage and introduce wildlife around Ashington, as well as helping the local insect and pollinator population.

It was AGREED to set aside £3,000 from the Climate Change budget to fund the materials and labour to make 200 bird box kits, and 60 woodland boxes. **It was AGREED** to amend the budget available, following a proposal from Cllr Lynne Grimshaw, on behalf of Bothal Ward Cllrs, with an additional £3,000 to fund a further 200 bird box kits, and 60 woodland boxes. Seaton Ward Cllrs agreed to make further funding available from the environmental enhancements should the demand exceed what is available.

It was AGREED boxes in the kits should have stamp to identify they have come from Ashington Town Council.

CCE24/048 DATE, TIME, AND VENUE OF THE NEXT MEETING

- ❖ Tuesday 30th July 2024, 5:00pm
- ❖ Tuesday 28th October 2024 5:00pm
- ❖ Tuesday 11th March 2025, 5:00pm

Meeting ends 18:53pm